



Tozeur & the Jerid

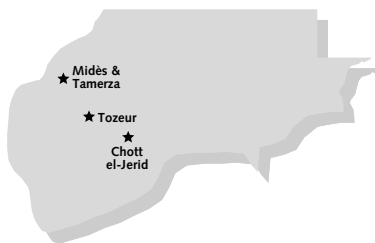
One of the more pleasant towns in the south is Tozeur, and because of its location and facilities, it's the logical base from which to explore this diverse region. Only a short drive from the sophisticated comforts of Tozeur's Zone Touristique, its attractive brick old quarter and its enormous *palmeraie* (palm grove) are several oasis towns – Tamerza, Chebika and Midès. This area along the Algerian border is carved with small canyons and offers swimming and hiking opportunities.

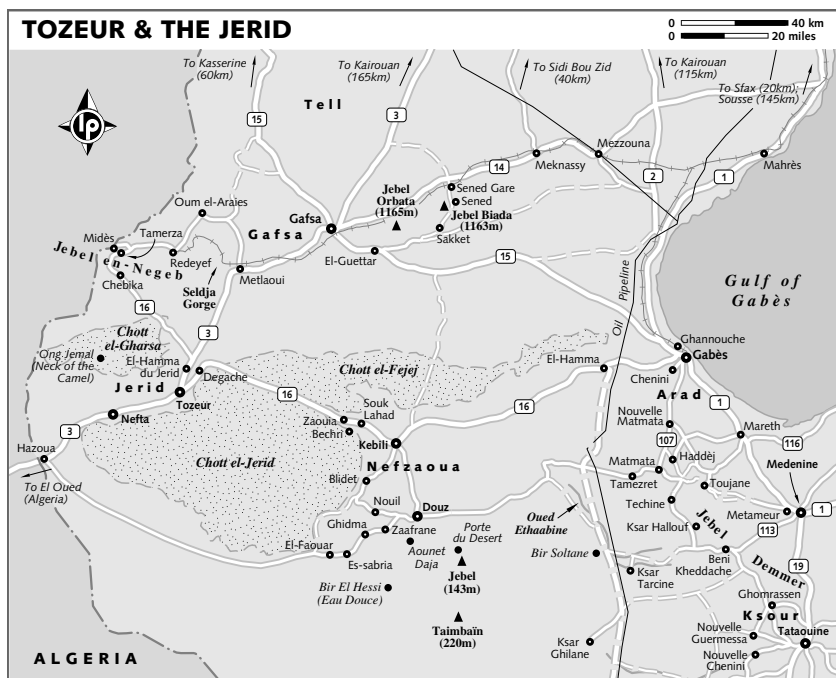
The Jerid itself, which all of these towns occupy, is the narrow strip of land between the region's two major salt lakes, the Chott el-Jerid and the Chott el-Gharsa. It has long been one of the most important agricultural districts in Tunisia and the oases around here are famous for their high-quality dates. The harvest is in October, which is a good time to visit the area.

While cartographers tend to label the Chott el-Jerid as a lake, for most of the year this bone-dry depression looks more like the moon. It's easy to lose your focus driving along the causeway that bisects the Chott, to try to catch a glimpse of the gypsum crystals that form in small pools alongside the road or to stare off into the hazy distance; later you may swear you saw odd things in the heat, like a desert wookiee, the species heretofore known only to *Star Wars* fans. There are several cafes along the way, though we use that term loosely since these are often nothing more than wooden shacks with optimistic signs inviting weary travellers in for a drink.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Catch some shade wandering through the manicured forests of Tozeur's **palmeraie** (p251)
- Don your hiking boots and navigate your way between Midès and Tamerza along the **gorge** (p257)
- Drive – don't walk or take a camel – across the mesmerising flat expanse of **Chott el-Jerid** (p251), where just looking out the window will make you feel dehydrated





TOZEUR

pop 35,500

For travellers in the south, Tozeur, boasting the widest range of hotels and restaurants, makes an excellent base for longer forays into the surrounding area. Bounded on one side by an enormous forest of palm trees and then the desolate Chott el-Jerid, the town itself feels simultaneously far-flung and welcoming. It's easy to spend a few days here occupied by the labyrinthine Ouled el-Hadef (old quarter) with its distinctive traditional brickwork and a few interesting and unique museums located in the town itself.

History

The oasis at Tozeur has been inhabited since about 8000 BC. It later developed into the small Roman town of Thuzuros, which lay within the *palmeraie* around the area now occupied by the district of Bled el-Hader. Tozeur's prosperity peaked during the age of the great trans-Saharan camel caravans, between the 14th and 19th centuries.

توزر

Orientation

Tozeur is easy to navigate. Most of the accommodation and many of the restaurants are on ave Abdulkacem Chebbi, which runs along the edge of the *palmeraie* on the southern side of town and continues into the Zone Touristique. Ave Farhat Hached skirts the northern edge of town and is your likely route into the city if coming from Kebili or Gafsa; it has several banks, cafes and restaurants. Ave Habib Bourguiba links the two primary roads and is lined with stalls and shops selling souvenirs and other goods.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Publnet (11 ave du 7 Novembre; per hr TD2; ☎ 24hr)
Good connections.

MEDIA

Kiosk (ave Habib Bourguiba) There's a kiosk with English-language and other international newspapers.

MONEY

You'll find branches of all the major Tunisian banks around the town centre. Those with